Guidelines For Research In Northern Alberta

Alberta

NORTHERN ALBERTA
DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

Guidelines For Research In Northern Alberta

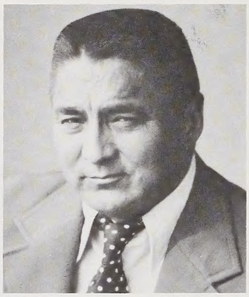
NORTHERN ALBERTA
DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL
JUNE, 1982

NORTHERN ALBERTA DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL 1982/83

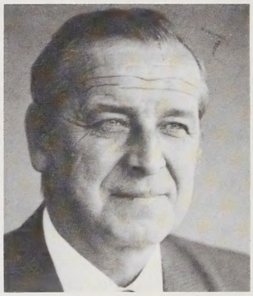
Elmer Borstad, M.L.A.
Chairman
Grande Prairie

Hon. J.A. Adair
Minister Responsible
for Northern Development
Peace River

Barbara Wilkinson
Vice-Chairman Athabasca

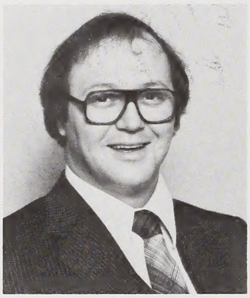


Peter Erasmus
McRae

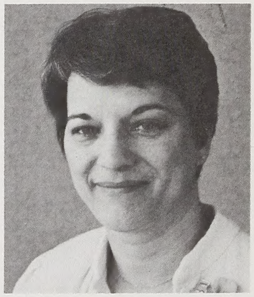


Walter Holowack
Grande Cache

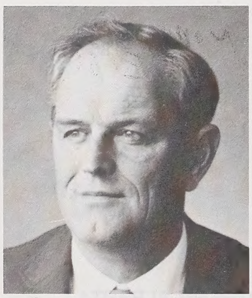
Christina Jones
McLennan



Barry Lazoruk
Rycroft



Joanne Mitchell
High Level



Dick Upham
Ashmont

Norm Weiss, M.L.A.
Lac La Biche - McMurray

Victor Young
Whitecourt

Alberta

NORTHERN ALBERTA
DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

403/624-6274

2nd Floor, Provincial Building
9621 - 96 Avenue
Postal Bag 900-14
Peace River, Alberta, Canada
TOH 2X0

June, 1982

Over the past number of years the Northern Alberta Development Council has sponsored some forty major studies examining a wide variety of topics. In an effort to assure that the public and various agencies were aware of this vast quantity of work, the Council hosted a Research Review Seminar in Peace River in June of 1981.

The Council was very pleased with the resulting process of discussion by the 100 knowledgeable people from government, industry, and northern communities who participated in the review.

During the Seminar, several recurrent themes emerged regarding the direction northern research should take in the future. All of the group discussion reports were subsequently reviewed by the Council and the following motions were passed:

1. That the Northern Alberta Development Council prepare a set of guidelines for use of consultants and communities in conducting research in northern Alberta.

2. That the Northern Alberta Development Council support the development of a central registry of research in northern Alberta.

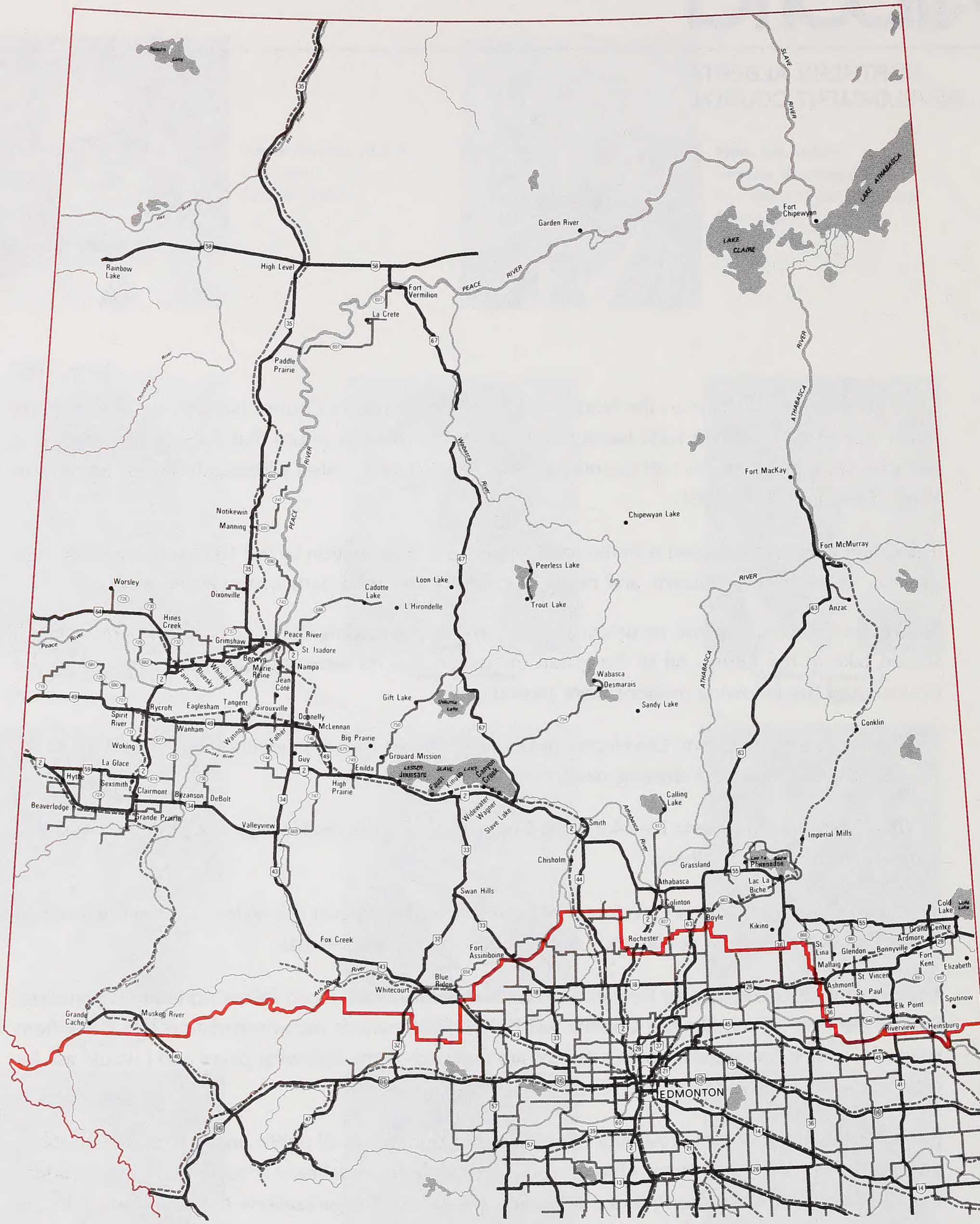
3. That the Northern Alberta Development Council strongly support the wide circulation of research findings to the general public and user agencies in northern Alberta.

This document, Guidelines for Research in Northern Alberta, is a direct follow-up to the first motion. During the next six months the Council will be working towards recommendation #2 - a northern research registry. Some details of this service are outlined on the following pages and I would ask for your support while we attempt to develop this central registry.

It is the hope of the Northern Alberta Development Council that all public and private organizations involved in research in northern Alberta would review these guidelines seriously and consider adopting them for their own use. We are aware of a number of organizations contemplating formally adopting the guidelines and we would be pleased to further discuss their spirit and content with interested agencies at any time.

Elmer Borstad

Elmer E. Borstad, M.L.A.
Chairman



NORTHERN ALBERTA DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL AREA

COMMUNITIES WITH POPULATION OVER 50 (1976 CANADA CENSUS)

km 10 0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 km

miles 10 0 10 20 30 40 50 miles

PRIMARY HIGHWAY — SECONDARY ROAD — RAILWAY

Produced by the Alberta Bureau of Surveying and Mapping

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREAMBLE

In June, 1981, approximately one hundred delegates attended a Research Review Seminar sponsored by the Northern Alberta Development Council. The participants represented agencies, industries, government departments, and private consultants, who were involved in conducting, sponsoring, or utilizing research in Northern Alberta. The objectives for the seminar were to examine:

1. the overall findings of research studies conducted or co-sponsored by the Council.
2. the implications of the findings regarding northern development and government service delivery.
3. the scope of research undertaken and common problems regarding northern development.
4. future directions with regard to topic areas, methodology and information dissemination.

One of the major outcomes of the two and one-half day meeting was a strong recommendation for the development of *guidelines and principles* for conducting and carrying out research in Northern Alberta.

Because the Northern Alberta Development Council was seen as a rather unique body relating to all provincial departments and all northern communities with a monitoring and coordinating mandate, it was further suggested that this group initiate the process of developing these recommended principles and procedures.

PHILOSOPHY AND SPIRIT OF NORTHERN RESEARCH

During the past decade or so, northern communities have become much more involved in the problem identification and research process. They clearly wish to be an active partner in programs and policy development which may directly affect them. With the experience gained over the past years, they feel they have a considerable contribution to make to the development and research process. In addition, northerners wish to maintain their unique characteristics, and wish these to flavour research in their various geographic regions. They want to see a blend of what they can offer and the spirit of the lifestyle they wish to maintain. Underlying all the specific recommendations regarding research guidelines, there are several clear principles which northerners wish to stress when a project is being contemplated.

1. Reasons for the research should be clearly stated. (Is the research truly necessary?)
2. The use and application of the results of the research should be extensively forecasted before the project is initiated. (What will happen to the findings?)
3. The community should gain something from the research process even though they may not be a direct sponsor of the project. (What can the community gain from the process?)
4. There should be useful ways to consult with or involve the community in the research without compromising the validity of the project. (How can the community be involved?)
5. Plans for community feedback and support should be built into the research. This plan should be discussed and possibly modified by the community. (What are the plans for community feedback and support?)
6. Planning for information dissemination at all stages of the project should be a priority of the researchers and sponsors. This plan should also be presented, modified, and ratified by the community. (What are the plans for information dissemination?)
7. An assessment should be made concerning any possible duplication between the proposed and past research. (Is the project a duplication of past research?)

Northern communities want good information and properly conducted research. They do not want to compromise good research, but they feel there are often many acceptable methodological alternatives which can be chosen in a particular situation. They would like input into these alternatives wherever possi-

ble. In addition, most northern community organizations interested in research do not want a set of rigid 'how to' procedures cast in stone. There are many groups who appreciate the fluidity of community situations and circumstances, and that good research techniques must be flexible enough to perceive new dimensions of particular problems being analyzed, and to adjust the techniques and approaches accordingly. But this flexibility and recognition of changing realities should not be confused with the insistence of northern communities that certain *principles* be adopted and followed as much as possible. The statements listed above outline seven major principles which should be followed in Northern Alberta research.

CENTRAL REGISTRY OF NORTHERN ALBERTA RESEARCH

It is recommended that an organization in Northern Alberta undertake the development of a registry of northern research projects. Such an endeavour would facilitate coordination of efforts and promote dissemination of research findings. It would also lessen the amount of duplicated effort that sometimes occurs.

As one discussion group at the Research Review Seminar reported ". . . there seemed to be an emerging concensus that within and between government departments there was a need for greater coordination and that this was a more 'proper' role for the Northern Alberta Development Council.

1. to serve as a registry for research,

2. to coordinate research efforts, and

3. to set up interdepartmental research liaison committees or steering committees that could aid in defining terms of reference for research."

Another group reported that it is necessary to "provide a coordinating mechanism that engenders trust and support of those on whom the research impacts."

The Council is prepared to meet this challenge by requesting the Northern Development Branch to initiate the process of developing and utilizing a central registry for northern research.

The characteristics of the registry would be as follows:

1. Organizations will be contacted for information.

2. Organizations can submit information to the registry at any time.

3. Organizations will be encouraged to submit outlines of past, present, and future research to the registry; however, the decision to participate would be left to the organizations and agencies involved.

4. The registry will include the following:
   a) Title of project.
   b) Brief description of project.
   c) Actual or anticipated completion dates of projects.
   d) Degree of confidentiality of the project.
   e) Which groups have or will have copies of the research.
   f) Sponsors of the project.
   g) Involvement of outside consultants.
   h) Local community people directly involved in the project.
   i) Summary of findings if completed.

5. Confidential information will not be released without the prior consent of the responsible agency.

6. A circular will be distributed to all relevant bodies quarterly or semi-annually summarizing the projects on the registry and where further information can be obtained.

7. Once the registry is established, information and inquiries regarding past, current, and future research in Northern Alberta can be addressed to:

   Northern Research Registry
   Northern Alberta Development Council
   Bag 900-14
   Peace River, Alberta T0H 2X0

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

It is recommended that communities be directly involved when they are being surveyed or researched.

This was a recurrent theme throughout the entire Research Review Seminar. Participants were angry because it is often the exception to consult and involve communities when research is being planned and carried out. It was also recognized that many organizations with research responsibilities are nervous about involving communities in their projects because with this added dimension they can't precisely predict all the outcomes. If appropriate approaches are utilized, and if there is sincere willingness to be open to community input, then the results of the project will be significantly superior than if no involvement took place at all.

Efforts to achieve community involvement are primarily the responsibility of the sponsors. While this may be the case, the researchers themselves must share this responsibility as well once given the mandate and general direction by the sponsor.

Often efforts to involve communities in research activities become stalemated because either the sponsor or the researchers do not understand "who the community is." Four general groupings can be made: elected officials, organized groups, the public who are not in organizations, and the people who stand to be impacted directly as a result of a development or project. The strategies as to whom to involve will depend largely on the specific nature of the research being undertaken. If it is a broad multi-disciplinary study, efforts should be undertaken to involve and consult with people from all four groupings. A very specific research project (e.g., should a second language be offered in grades 1 to 4) could primarily involve the school board, parents, parent-school organizations, and any associations directly interested in that language.

There are a variety of ways that community involvement can take place. The following stages of a research program are areas where it is appropriate to consult with community representatives.

1. **Project Initiation:** When a research project is first conceived, there is a natural tendency on the part of the sponsor to develop study terms of reference that meet only their own needs. In those instances where the research will have a direct effect on the community or where the research is a prelude to an economic or social development project, the community should be viewed as a partner. A partner with its own agenda, problems and aspirations, some consultation and negotiation with the community prior to the actual initiation of the research is strongly recommended. Ideally, both

the sponsor and the researcher (if different) should be jointly involved at this stage.

2. **Entry to the Community or "Initial Disclosure:"** A very important consideration is how researchers or consultants first announce their intention to the community. If the overall objectives are "carved in stone" and the motivation of the researcher is one of persuasion and "selling" these to local residents, he or she runs the real risk of the project back-firing. There are numerous examples of community alienation caused by this approach.

   Following are several suggestions as to how this "entry phase" can be made more successful.

   a) While persuasion and public relations can be legitimate, there should be a "negotiation" and "clearing" stage so that everyone benefits from the process. Rumours and false information will be lessened, and if local requests that do not compromise the validity of the research are built in, much more cooperation will result.

   b) Public meetings such as town hall open meetings, open-house coffee sessions, meetings inviting the significant community leaders can be effective tools depending upon the particular situation involved. The process used should be tailor-made and appropriate to the particular community involved.

   c) Media coverage including a "contact" name and telephone number so local people can obtain further information is often a good idea.

   d) Community steering or advisory committees can be effective as a liaison between the research organization and the local residents. Often there is an existing community group in place which can assume this function. This can work very well when such a group has credibility and legitimacy in the community. Other times it is better for the sponsor/researcher to call together such a group to work with the researcher throughout the process. If this method is chosen, care should be taken to have representation from a wide variety of community interests.

   e) Newsletters distributed regularly to community leaders regarding the progress of the study. Often community groups can assist in this function if extra costs are covered.

   f) Flexibility should be maintained so that some of the local needs can be incorporated into the project. If the community has no stake in the research, their cooperation or interest in the research is decreased.

   g) Sufficient time should be allocated so that this "initial disclosure" or "entry" phase is not rushed. Often the time required for a successful beginning is underestimated.

3. **Manpower** - Wherever possible the use of local resources should be considered. It is understandable that people become upset when a blanket of "imported" interviewers descends upon a town to complete a project. The question a research group should answer honestly before they proceed with the project is: "What are all the possible ways local people can be employed in this project?" Interviewing, training, coding, interpretation of results, and feedback are all potential areas to consider.

   The "manpower" areas which should be treated more cautiously, relate to interview questions of a sensitive and confidential nature. There may be areas of a questionnaire that could cause embarrassment to the interviewer and the person being interviewed if they know each other. However, there can be ways to alleviate this potential problem somewhat through proper training and geographic assignments away from the interviewers immediate home area.

   The "manpower" considerations should go along simultaneously with the "entry" or "initial disclosure" to the community as this will likely be one of the first questions raised by the groups and individuals contacted.

PLANNING FOR INFORMATION DISSEMINATION AND DISTRIBUTION

There should be very little research done unless a commitment is made at the onset for the release of the final results. Where possible, a "release of information" clause should be written into the terms of reference for particular projects.

The delegation attending the Research Review Seminar generally felt that organizations tend to hold back more information than is required. To some extent it is a natural tendency for most organizations to over-anticipate negative feedback over research findings. However, more attention should be given to the likely negative or hostile reaction when information is not released.

Certainly there are some projects which must be carried out in a confidential manner. When sponsoring groups are involved in these research tasks, a clear statement of purpose should be given to those being surveyed or contacted. This statement can come from the sponsor of the project or the researchers

themselves if they have concurrence of the organization calling for the study.

There are several effective methods of information dissemination:

1. **Project initiation:** The objectives and scope of the research activity should be circulated, and discussed with the target population and relevant organization.

2. **Progress Reports:** One effective way of maintaining a high trust level with the target population is through the circulation of progress reports. These can be in the form of newsletters, newspaper articles, or mini-reports. Public meetings, presentations to stakeholder groups and invitational meetings involving key people are other effective methods to be considered.

   Progress reports should also be written up or presented in a fashion that is interesting and contemporary. The objective is to keep people informed and where possible to solicit their input. Often community representatives can be a tremendous help in providing feedback to drafts of interim progress reports.

3. **Sequential Release of Information:** One of the major reasons why there is little interest at the conclusion of projects is the tendency of many researchers to submit the entire final report at one time. The client, relevant agencies, and community representatives become overwhelmed with facts, figures and conclusions.

   It is also very important to release information to the community well before their feedback is required. Too often there is inadequate time to digest the results. This creates frustration and bad feelings.

   Many research projects lend themselves to a sequential release of information. Various chapters of the final report can often be released fairly independently of the others. After a number of the main chapters are released, the final report can be an effective method of bringing everything together. Meetings to discuss the entire report tend to be more productive when the participants have been involved in earlier specific releases.

4. **Drafts:** Utilizing the principles of involvement and ownership, the strategy of circulating draft reports to members of the community can make the research process much more productive. If reports are issued only as absolutely final, strong reactions can occur. Participants can legitimately feel closed out. By circulating a draft of final reports or sections of the final report and setting up mechanisms where input is received, two objectives are usually met:

   a) Participants and reviewers become more familiar and knowledgeable with the findings and

b) A greater degree of acceptability emerges for the end product if legitimate revisions are built into the final report.

5. **Executive Summaries:** The use of executive summaries by research organizations seems to be increasing year by year. These can be utilized as a separate chapter in the final report or as an accompanying document. The guideline should be: "How can the executive summary be written to be interesting and informative reading?" Details of findings and references should be included in the main reports, rather than in the summary. Illustrations, pictures and colloquial language can be effective for such a document.

The feedback to the Northern Alberta Development Council regarding information dissemination is constant. Wherever possible, research should be made available to those affected by the findings. The methods utilized to share information should again be community centered utilizing more than one "technique." The Research Review Seminar demonstrated that a majority of government, community and industry representatives involved in research are of much the same opinion.

Dissemination of the findings of research must be approached from a common-sense perspective. Often research sponsors examine the question about the benefits of *not* publically releasing research reports. The other question regarding the benefits of publicly releasing information should be examined too. It is important to examine this latter question with the understanding that in the absence of information, communities tend to "fear the worst."

PLANNING FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND FOLLOW-UP

Research should normally not be undertaken unless provision is made to build in an appropriate mechanism to implement the results. Many groups have had success with "follow-up" committees.

While some "background" research must occasionally be carried out, the emphasis clearly has to be on problem solving and action-oriented projects.

The implementation process can be greatly enhanced if research oriented groups and line departments work closely together on projects in cooperation with particular communities if they are to be part of the target group.

If the research design is such that the monitoring or implementation committee has input into the recommendation/conclusion stages of the research product, there will likely be a more productive utilization of the findings by government departments, industry and community groups. This strategy should not be misinterpreted to mean the monitoring groups have total responsibility for drafting the recommendations of final reports. If this happens, the credibility of the entire endeavor can be jeopardized. The substance of the recommendations/conclusions should not be altered unless it is clear they do not flow out of the specific data collected in the process.

USE OF CONSULTANTS

There are several reasons why consultants are being extensively used by research organizations:

1. Time and manpower constraints.
2. Lack of expertise within the community, industry and government organizations sponsoring or conducting the research.
3. The need for an informed independent viewpoint.

Because communities are becoming more involved in research as partners with government and private industry, often they are consulted regarding the choice of consultant and asked to have input into the terms of reference which consultants will have to follow during the course of the project. For these reasons, there should be some guidelines regarding hiring and working with private consultants.

1. **Northern Expertise:** If a consultant is required on a particularly sensitive issue in northern Alberta, the personnel selected for the task should have credible northern experience. This becomes critically important when native communities are part of the target group. Often consultants are selected for their background or experience specific to similar projects. Research sponsors are strongly encouraged to consider northern experience as another dominant criterion in consultant selection. If northern expertise is not considered, the research sponsor runs a risk of a poorer quality product and expending considerable funds for a consultant's learning curve. If the consulting firm chosen does not have the required northern experience

research sponsors might ask them to consider an association with a firm or individual who has credible northern experience.

2. **Terms of Reference and Time Deadlines:** The importance of a good clear set of terms of reference cannot be overstated. Consultants and clients can walk away from a meeting thinking they understand each other. However, many projects fail because of vague goals which mean different things to different people.

   Some suggestions for credible terms of reference are:

   a) An overall goal or objective of the project should be clearly stated. This lends a focus to the study.

   b) If possible this primary objective should be broken down into a series of meaningful sub-objectives or goals.

   c) The terms of reference should be written in clear concise language. Ambiguous works should be avoided.

   d) Activities and tasks of the consultant should be clearly identified; e.g., a minimum of 100 randomly chosen adults over the age of 18 shall be interviewed; a preliminary meeting about the project shall be held between the consultant and the following groups ___________; ten copies of progress reports are due every two months; ten copies of the draft final report shall be due on ___________ .

   e) There should be a clear requirement for a breakdown of the research design, work plan, including timing of major activities, organization of the research team, responsibilities of each research team member, consultant days to be devoted by each team member matched up with the tasks they will assume, fees for each member, and if possible, fees for overall costs for each major task of the project.

   f) A policy statement should be included stating clearly if the project will be public or confidential. If a study must be totally confidential, there should be a written statement passed on to the consultants which can be used when they are asked questions about the project. However, when confidentiality is likely to be an issue, it usually applies to particular sections of the study. In such cases the policy statement should indicate what aspects of the project will be confidential and why.

   g) The authority for the project should be clearly identified. Is it one person only or a committee? When more than one person is to be involved with the consultant, roles and responsibility should be clearly defined.

   h) Payment procedures should be specific. Two common approaches are: payment on a predetermined time basis for all fees/expenses incurred or

progress payments spread out through the life of the contract with the requirement of an accounting record to be submitted at the termination of work.

i) It is also important to identify the time deadlines for all the phases of the research project as well as for the draft and final reports.

Before finalizing the schedule for a project, care should be taken to assure that adequate time is allowed for tasks that are typically rushed. Examples of these include the community or agency consultation phase touched on earlier, the process of obtaining feedback on draft reports, etc. Consultants are sometimes legitimately concerned with the "artificial time deadline phenomenon." This refers to the tendency to pull dates out of the air without any linkage to the real needs of programs and policies. These deadlines can be a frustrating experience for all concerned.

j) A provision for a procedure to revise items within the terms of reference should be established. Such revision are quite common when genuine community based research gets off the ground. Situations arise which cause the terms of reference to be outdated or unrealistic. One acceptable way of building a mechanism for change is through an exchange of letters. Of course, a great deal of care must be taken that such revisions are necessary and that the project isn't just "getting off track."

k) Hold-back clauses are a topic of controversy. It is clear the client has the right and even the responsibility to include such a clause in either the terms of reference or the contract itself. The issue is how much should be held back. With the high cost of money and frequent delays in processing accounts, the hold-back amount can create problems for a consultant. The recommended range is between 5 - 15%, with 10% as a good benchmark.

l) Advertising the cost of the project is also somewhat controversial. Some organizations feel the costs don't have to be specified if the terms of reference are specific and clear. Other groups with budget constraints find it is more productive to advertise either the maximum funding available or a range of support.

In estimating a budget, here are some suggestions:

Estimate the professional person-days involved and multiply that by the average current consulting rate and then add the estimate of expenses and printing. The estimate can be made easier by talking to people experienced in the field. If public and committee involvement is a pre-requisite, do not under-estimate the time involved.

If budget figures are not established, a few guidelines should be considered: expect a wide range of bids, anticipate difficulty in evaluating a very broad range of proposals, and solicit more proposals than you would ordinarily call for in order to have sufficient numbers with the affordable funding range.

Often when cost limits are not specified, there are nevertheless pre-determined allocations made for the study in question. Consultants interested in bidding on a tender will often try to find out if such a limit has been established within the contracting organization.

m) The method of contracting work to consultants varies considerably from organization to organization. Some common techniques are open tender for proposals, open call for letter of interest followed by a screening procedure producing a short-list for proposal calls, direct proposal calls to a short-list of consultants, and direct negotiation and award of a contract to a single consultant. Each method had advantages and disadvantages.

The feedback from most of the consultants at the Research Review Seminar was that they do not like the open call for proposal approach. The number of consultants submitting proposals under such a system often is large, and the competition and time factor is very extensive. Instead they prefer a short-list approach where they have some chance of being considered for the project.

Once the terms of reference have been satisfactorily developed and the project is initiated, there exists the danger of having these "expanded" while the study is underway. This can occur at any time during the life of the project, but it typically happens after a progress report has been submitted. Assuming the terms of reference are being adequately followed, any suggestion for a further expansion will necessitate a trade-off. Either more funds will be necessary, or less effort should be given to one or more of the existing items contained in the terms of reference. Any agreement on a change should be in writing.

CONCLUSION

Throughout northern Alberta there is a significant amount of research activity either underway or being planned. Government departments are a major actor in the process, but by no means the only ones. Resource companies are extensively involved in technical, environmental, social and economic studies. In addition, many northern municipalities and a number of special interest associations also directly commission or conduct research programs. This means that there is a danger of duplication and community fatigue. Most communities in the North have evolved to where they want a meaningful role in the process and question the legitimacy and proprietary of much research.

These suggested guidelines for northern research are directed toward improving the quality, acceptability, relevance and utility of the research process in northern Alberta. The principles emanated from the serious discussions of one hundred people concerned with common research problems. It is hoped all organizations indirectly or directly involved with northern study endeavors will be able to apply these guidelines to their own programs.